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ABSTRACT

A study examined female and male university students' perceptions about career choice. Essay response questionnaires were administered to 52 university students in speech communication courses in the Fall of 1990 and 55 students the following semester. After reviewing student responses, survey response questions were developed and administered to 258 students from both regular sections and honors sections of the basic speech communication course from 1991 to 1994. Results indicated that: (1) career decision-making problems for females were continuing ones; (2) females chose careers that less suited their interests than males; (3) females were very influenced by public perceptions about careers; (4) females had lower levels of career aspirations than males; (5) males had high influence on the career decision making of females; and (6) both males and females chose careers based on sex role stereotypes. Speech communication educators need to provide gender responsible leadership and to work at implementing interventions through their collectiveness and their collaboration as professionals. (Contains 15 references.) (RS)

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Females At Risk in the Future Workplace: Gender Credibility Perceptions and Communication Educator Problems in the Building of Community

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Females At Risk in the Future Workplace: Gender Credibility Perceptions and Communication Educator Problems in the Building of Community

ABSTRACT

Males and females have different attitudes and different anxieties about career decision making. These attitudes, and their related anxieties, continue to put females at risk in the workplace. The problem is based on gender credibility perceptions based on biased communication. A four year study was conducted with female and male university students, at a large midwestern university, concerning perceptions about career choice. Several examples from the findings were that career decision making problems for females are continuing ones. Females choose careers that less suit their interests than males. Females are very influenced by public perceptions about careers. Females have lower levels of career aspirations than men. Males have high influence in the career decision making of females. Both males and females choose careers based on sex role stereotypes. This subject, and this problem, are directly related to the 1994 Speech Communication Association theme, Building Community. The community should provide equally for both men and women in their career choices. Speech communication educators need to address this situation, to provide gender responsible leadership and to work at implementing interventions through their collectiveness and their collaboration as professionals.

A man in general is better pleased when he has a good dinner than when his wife talks Greek.
Samuel Johnson

It would be preposterously naive to suggest that a BA can be made as attractive to girls as a marriage license.
Dr. Grayson Kirk
Former President of Columbia University

The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul is: what does a woman want?
Sigmund Freud

Whenever a woman dies, there is one quarrel less on earth.
Old German Proverb

Men are logical.
Men are brave.
Men are strong.
Men are aggressive.
Men are competitive.
Men want women to be submissive.
Men are smarter than women.

Women have intuition.
Women are emotional.
Women are sensitive and gentle.
Women like to keep house and cook.
Women are fragile and delicate.
Women are happier when they are married.
Women want men to take charge.

Stereotyped Statements

Is it any wonder that females are at risk in the future workplace? Is it any wonder that with the gender credibility perceptions that females have problems knowing who they are and where their place is in the working world? In building community with equality for both females and males, communication educators have a responsibility for seriously addressing this problem. This issue prompted a four year study using female and male university student perceptions about career choice for females and the related anxieties.

What is the existing situation in regard to women in the workplace? Steps have been made toward establishing equality, but there is a long struggle ahead to ascertain true equality in the workplace for both males and females. Susan Tiano (Hess, 1987) reported on how women are overworked and underpaid.

> Women's labor accounts for two-thirds of the world's work hours, yet they receive only 10% of the income and own less than 1% of the property. Recognition of women's disadvantaged status led the United Nations to declare 1975-1985 the Decade for Women, convening international conferences, passing resolutions and formulating plans for enhancing women's well-being. Yet the goals of the Decade for Women remain largely unfulfilled (p. 216).

England and McCreary surveyed gender inequality in the segregation of jobs and the monetary and nonmonetary rewards in male and female employment (Hess, 1987).

> A major form of gender differentiation is the segregation of jobs by sex. Men and women generally hold different jobs requiring different kinds of skills. This segregation is attended by a sex gap in pay, with most "male jobs" offering higher earnings than most "female jobs (p. 286)."

The reasons for this existing problem are numerous. There are basic differences in the way men and women communicate, including biases in the language concerning sex differences and nonverbal communication variations. (Henley, Hamilton, & Thorne, 1984; Tannen, 1986, 1990; Fitzpatrick, 1988; Borisoff & Merrill, 1992; Arbor & Ginn, 1991; Tubbs & Moss, 1991; Malandro, Barker & Barker, 1989; Phelps & Austin, 1990; Stewart, Stewart, Friedley & Cooper, 1990). These problems and perceptions are reinforced by the media (Dow, 1992). It is of paramount important to have an understanding of these differences in order to correct them and to understand how they influence future workplace decisions. Then, as speech communicators, it is necessary to attack the problems in our education system (Peterson, 1991; Beere, King, & King, 1991). It is the right for equality that must be continually confronted. Franklyn S. Haiman (1991) puts this responsibility for educators in the following words:

> Indeed, I would hope that in our schools, especially as we confront the whole range of problems of sexist speech, we would see our role as that of educators rather than police officers. Not only will that be more effective in the long run, but it will be more in keeping with both the letter and the spirit of the First Amendment (p. 23).

METHOD

In the fall of 1990, 52 university students, in speech communication classes, were asked to complete an essay response questionnaire concerning career indecision problems and related anxieties. The results were very informative. Many of their problems and concerns related to male and female perceptions regarding their success and opportunities in the future workplace. The students' statements were reviewed, and essay questions were developed which were based on the their perceptions. The questionnaire was administered to 55 university students the following semester.

After reviewing the student responses from both semesters, survey response questions were developed and administered to 258 students from both regular sections and

honors sections of the basic speech communication course, from 1991-1994, with the following results. These were first used as a part of a career anxiety questionnaire and then as a separate questionnaire in 1993-94).

RESULTS

Following are responses to questions concerning whether male and female university students perceive career choice differently. Questions were taken on a 7 point scale:
7 = Always True to 4 = Sometimes True to 1 = Never True

	Mean	SD
1 I think females tend to have careers that less suit their interests than males.	3.31	1.47
2 I think public perceptions of careers for females are important factors in female career selection.	3.63	1.56
3 I think that females have lower levels of career aspirations than males.	2.94	1.41
4 I think that females are more suited for jobs involving nurturance (teaching, nursing, social work, etc.).	3.35	1.59
5 I think that male attitudes about female career roles influence females.	4.63	1.33
6 I think that when a mother works, a daughter is more likely to work.	5.00	1.40
7 I think the more education that a female receives, the more likely she is to pursue a career.	5.71	1.40
8 I think that females receive less compensation than males for doing the same work.	4.74	1.35
9 I think that males avoid careers in traditionally female fields.	5.10	1.28
10 I think that males are more suited for jobs involving the manipulation of data.		
11 I think that when mothers work, a son is more likely to favor his wife working.	4.71	1.32

12 I think that the male career should be dominant when it comes to choosing a place for a married couple to live.	3.20	1.87
13 I think that males and females tend to choose careers based on sex role stereotypes.	4.41	1.26
14 I think, for females, work is a hobby, a luxury, etc., and childrearing, taking care of a husband and family needs, are their true job responsibilities.	2.92	1.81
15 With a married couple, the partner who makes the most money should determine the place to live.	3.45	1.70
16 There will be differences in the way that males and females answer this questionnaire.	6.02	1.38

Following are significant responses to questions concerning whether male and female university students perceive career choice differently. Questions were taken on a 7 point scale:
7 = Always True to 4 = Sometimes True to 1 = Never True

	Males **Females**	**Mean** **Mean**	**SD** **SD**	**t value***
I think females tend to have careers that less suit their interests than males.		3.74 2.97	1.55 1.43	1.78
I think public perceptions of careers for females are important factors in female career selection.		3.95 3.97	1.36 1.76	.04
I think that females have lower levels of career aspirations than males.		2.89	1.25	.17
I think male attitudes about female career roles influence females.		4.95 4.77	1.23 1.23	.46
I think males and females tend to choose careers based on sex role stereotypes.		4.32 4.67	1.08 1.42	.92

The following responses are for questions concerning whether male and female university students perceive career choice differently. These results are from both regular sections and honors sections of the basic speech communication course. Questions were taken on a 7 point scale:
7 = Always True to 4 = Sometimes True to 1 = Never True

I think females tend to have careers that less suit their interests than males.

	Mean	t value*
Regular	3.389	.5202
Honors	3.167	
Grand Mean	3.250	

F = .027 p = .8702

I think public perceptions of careers for females are important factors in female career selection.

	Mean	t value*
Regular	3.611	.0467
Honors	3.633	
Grand Mean	3.625	

F = .0022 p = .9630

I think the more education that a female receives, the more likely she is to pursue a career.

	Mean	t value*
Regular	5.556	.5012
Honors	5.767	
Grand Mean	5.688	

F = .251 p = .6186

DISCUSSION

Findings indicated that career decision making problems for females still exist in today's world. Females choose careers that less suit their interests than males and are very influenced by public perceptions about careers. Females have lower levels of career aspirations than men. Males have high influence in the career decision making of females. Both males and females choose careers based on sex role stereotypes. Females need not be at risk in the future workplace, if we work ardently on changing gender credibility perceptions. As communication educators, it is our responsibility to address these issues in building community.

In this research study, statistics indicated that: (1) males and females have different attitudes and different anxieties about career decision making; (2) that males have high influence in females' career decision making; (3) that females choose careers that less suit their interests than males; (4) that females are greatly interested by public perceptions about careers; (5) that females have lower levels of career aspirations than males; (6) that both males and females choose careers based on sex role stereotypes. As speech communication educators, and indeed as individuals, there is a responsibility for providing gender responsibile information and leadership.

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